

A study on the politeness strategies in conversational activities in the coursebook “unlock 3”

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Received: 16/04/2024; Accepted: 26/04/2024; Published: 15/5/2024

Abstract: study aims at investigating politeness strategies in conversational activities in the “Unlock 3”. In order to do that, the author selected 85 utterances from conversational activities in the coursebook to evaluate the politeness strategies applied. The result shows that almost of positive and negative politeness strategies are found in the conversations. Among those, the positive strategies 5 and 7 and the negative strategies 1, 2 and 6 are most frequently used. In addition, some suggestions to teach these strategies effectively are also provided.

Keywords: Language, English; Communication; Conversation

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Rationale

In the information and technology era, English has now become the most powerful language over the world and has been considered “a golden key to every door”. Therefore, using English to communicate is a must for everybody. As a matter of fact, to help learners attain the good command of communication, culture plays an indispensable role. Nguyen Quang (1998:2) states that, “One cannot master a language without profound awareness of its cultural background and in both verbal and non-verbal communication, culture makes itself strongly felt” or Winston Brembeck (1997:37) noted that, “To know another language and not his culture is a very good way to make a fluent fool of oneself”. Learners will truly succeed in using English when they must be aware of the relationship between language and culture, especially the hidden part of target culture including politeness strategies used commonly in daily social interaction.

For these reasons, the author would like to carry out a small-scale study on investigating the positive and negative politeness strategies in conversational activities of the course book *Unlock 3* by Clive Oxenden and Christina Latham-Koeing with a view to improving the teaching and learning of politeness strategies in this course book.

2. Aims of the study

The aims of the study are:

To raise Vietnamese learner’s awareness of how to use politeness strategies appropriately in order to achieve successful communication.

To put forward some suggestions for the teaching of positive and negative polite strategies to language teachers.

3. Objectives of the study

To achieve these aims, the following are set forth as objectives of the research:

positive strategies employed in the conversational activities in the specified course book;

negative politeness strategies employed in the conversational activities in the specified course book;

possible implications for effectiveness of politeness strategies in verbal communication via English.

4. Scope of the study

This research is focused on positive and negative politeness strategies in conversational activities of the course book “*Unlock 3*”. The investigation is based mainly on the theoretical framework of Brown and Levinson (1987) and Nguyen Quang (2002). Off record politeness strategies, politeness rules and politeness principles are out of the scope of this study.

5. Significance of the study

This study contributes to making explicit the important role of politeness strategies in verbal communication, especially in cross-cultural communication. Practical significance: This study helps gain an insight into the method employable for teaching politeness strategies in the course book “*Unlock 3*” as well as in adjustment and application of teaching techniques.

II. METHODOLOGY

1. Research questions

What types of positive politeness strategies are used in conversational activities of the course book “*Unlock 3*”?

What types of negative politeness strategies are used in conversational activities of the course book “*Unlock 3*”?

What are the possible suggestions for effective teaching of politeness strategies?

2. Research Method

The researcher uses descriptive and qualitative method because this research describes the way politeness strategies are used by someone and provides the answers to the questions of what types of something happened, but not why something happened or why someone was involved (explanatory research).

3. Data Analysis

There are five steps for data analysis:

Examining the course book carefully. The researcher examined the course book only three times. All utterances appearing in the units, especially in the listening tasks, are picked up.

Setting up the contexts, and discussing with colleagues, the supervisor to find out whether these statements are “natural” and “polite”.

Classifying the politeness strategies based on the framework proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987:94-227) and Nguyen Quang (2002). Interpreting the data.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Recapitulation

The research is about the positive and negative politeness strategies in the course book *Unlock 3*. The study is an attempt to describe and systematize politeness strategies in the light of theoretical framework proposed by Brown & Levinson and Nguyen Quang. Besides, the author tries to provide readers with a thorough and brief overview of theory to find out the types of politeness strategies employed in this course book. In addition, after the illustration of the methodology used to collect and analyze data, reasonable discussions are to be offered to each of the politeness strategies established. The findings show that almost negative and politeness strategies are employed in conversational activities in the course book. However, positive politeness strategies are more frequently used than negatives politeness strategies.

2. Concluding remarks

a. Concluding remarks on objective 1

The study indicates that in this course book positive politeness strategy is the most frequently used in order to show their respect and regard from the S to the H. Most positive politeness strategies are in use except strategies 2 (exaggerate), 3 (intensify H's interest), 11 (be optimistic) and 15 (give gifts). It also reveals that strategies 5 (seek agreement) and 7 (presuppose/ raise/

assert common ground) are the most used strategies. It appears that positive politeness strategies are more widely used than negative politeness strategies in social behavior, suggestion and respond, whereas in making request situations negative politeness strategies are more preferred.

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b. Concluding remarks on objective 2

Negative politeness strategies is mainly used to create the distance between S and H in order to show deference and formal air to H, thus freeing H from imposition. Negative politeness is employed more in social situations that potentially cause FTAs. Negative politeness strategies used in this course book are: strategy 1 (Be conventionally indirect); strategy 2 (Question, hedge); strategy 3 (Be pessimistic); strategy 4 (Minimize the imposition); strategy 5 (Give deference); strategy 6 (Apologize) and strategy 7 (Impersonalize S & H). Among them, strategy 2, 1 and 6 are most frequently used.

c. Concluding remarks on objective 3

It can be seen that politeness is not an easy task in the process of teaching and learning English. Although it is a hard task, the politeness needs more attention and effort from both learners and teachers. These concluding remarks provide the answer for the third question of the study: “*What are the possible suggestions for effective teaching of politeness strategies?*”

First of all, teachers need to help students aware of the importance of politeness and politeness strategies in social interaction. That is the students may be pointed out whether positive and negative politeness strategies are acceptable, preferable in English in certain conversational activities.

In real life communication, it is more important to pay attention to politeness and respect to other rather than meaning of words together. Therefore, teachers

should emphasize more on functional language than its structures. Polite or appropriate utterances should be focused in a way that language functions as well as forms.

Thirdly, when learning communication or practice conversational activities students should be provided real life situations or put in real social interaction contexts because the best ways to teach another language is by social situations. By doing these practical activities students will be aware which utterances are acceptable or polite in English, or which polite strategies are appropriate in certain situations to attain the furthest communicative goal.

Last but not least, when being put in social behavior, suggestion and responding conversations, teachers should suggest and instruct learners appropriate phrases or words which belongs to positive strategies to practice. Whereas in request conversations, some phrases and words in negative strategies should be emphasized for students to best attain the communicative purposes.

IV. CONCLUSION

Although the study has offered some insightful findings, like many other studies, there are some limitations. The research only deals with negative and positive politeness strategies. Moreover, the study only focuses on one book in its series of four books.

Therefore, all utterances picked out are restricted; this clearly affects the validity of the research results.

It is hereby suggested that a further study be carried out in relation to the other aspects of politeness strategies, such as bald on record, off record in this book as well as the other books in this series.

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5.2. Implications

Based on the above results of the study, it can be proposed that the course relating to the 2018 GEEC at upper secondary level should be added to the English teacher training program at Saigon University in the next training cycle. This course is essential and beneficial for students because it will ensure they can absorb the core contents and objectives of the 2018 GEEC at upper secondary level.

However, if adding such a course is not feasible due to content and class time constraints, Saigon University can consider integrating the contents of the 2018 GEEC at upper secondary level into existing courses such as "Theory of English Language Teaching 1 and 2, English Teaching Methodology 1, 2, 3, and 4".

Additionally, for lecturers at Saigon University, they need to further study the orientation and teaching content distribution of this curriculum to timely provide and integrate them into the teaching practice of

students in the aforementioned courses. For English-major students at Saigon University, they need to be more proactive in self-studying and updating themselves about the curriculum through documents from the Ministry of Education and Training, and seek help from lecturers if they have any questions.

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